

Plan for February 12, 2018 Conversation

7:00 Small Groups with a facilitator and note keeper. Take a moment for brief introductions at your table.

7:05 Part I What do we value about public education?

- Public schools are free.
- Public schools guarantee access for all and are required to serve the needs of all kind of students.
- Public schools are publicly funded.
- Public schools are owned and governed democratically.
- Public schools are required by law---through public oversight through the democratic process---to protect the rights of all students.
- Public schools serve not only students' individual needs but also the community's interest in an educated electorate.

Consider this list and think about whether there are qualities you might want to add. Which of these principles inherent in public education are most compelling to you?

Now think about Betsy Devos. (Background: You read a couple of Jan Resseger's blog posts about Betsy DeVos, the U.S. Secretary of Education in the Trump Administration. DeVos is a strong supporter of privatization--both unregulated charters schools and tuition vouchers students carry to private and parochial schools. She rationalizes privatization with the contention that parents ought to have the freedom or liberty to choose a school for each of their children.)

- 1. Consider together what it is about Betsy DeVos's values that contradicts the core values of public education and justifies privatization?**
- 2. Compare and contrast DeVos's statements and the statements from John Dewey and Paul Wellstone. (Wellstone's full statement is at the end of the post.).**
- 3. How do Betsy DeVos' beliefs about education contrast with your own?**

7:30 Part II What is education privatization and how does it impact the public schools?

Background At the end of the *Charters and Consequences* booklet from the Network for Public Education, on p 41, is a four point summary of the NAACP's 2016 Resolution demanding a moratorium on the authorization of new charter schools until:

- Charters are held to the same transparency and accountability as public schools;
- Public funds are no longer diverted to charters at the expense of public school systems;
- Charters cease expelling students that public schools have a duty to educate; and
- Charters cease to perpetuate racial segregation.

Then on pp. 47-48, the Network for Public Education publishes its own statement on charter schools, writing: "(T)he Network for Public Education regards charter schools as a failed experiment that our organization cannot support.... (W)e support all legislation and regulation that will make charters better learning environments for students and more accountable to the taxpayers who fund them. Such legislation would include the following:

- An immediate moratorium on the creation of new charter schools, including no replication or expansion of existing charter schools;
- The transformation of for-profit charters to non-profit charters;
- The transformation of for-profit management organizations to non-profit management organizations;
- All due process rights for charter students that are afforded public school students, in all matters of discipline;
- Required certification of all school teaching and administrative staff...
- And a list of eleven further conditions.

- 1. Discuss the problems with privatized charter schools.as raised by the NAACP and the Network for Public Education. Do these complaints worry you? Which ones worry you most?**
- 2. Charter schools and tuition vouchers for private schools create a second and then a third system---all being paid for with public funds. Are there any conditions when there would be a place for these two privatized systems?**

7:55 Break--Everyone get up, look at John Dewey's "I believe" statements posted around the room.

Consider how Dewey's beliefs contrast with today's test-based, corporate-accountability-driven school reform. Leave comments on the newsprint.

(See two other sheets attached to e-mail---the INSTRUCTIONS for the exercise and a list of Dewey's "I believe" statements that will be printed on newsprint.)

8:05 Part III Progressive Education vs. No-Excuses Privatization---what it all means.

Background: Charter schools are unregulated by design. They are also established in state law, which means they differ from place to place, but the problems of these schools in other states are representative of the kind of widespread transformation that affects public schools everywhere.

And the challenges may be inside the schools---in the methods and pedagogy, not merely in their governance and funding. No-Excuses charters are an example. KIPP Schools, Achievement First Charter Schools, and New York's Success Academy Charters all operate according to no-excuses discipline.

You read a blog post from Jan Resseger about Success Academy Charter Schools in NYC. Here are two quotes that were embedded in the blog post, the first from Shael Polakow-Suransky, president of the Bank Street College of Education, commenting on the kind of education students experience at Success Academies Charter Schools:

- “They have a philosophy that, to create a context for learning, it’s necessary to build a total institutional culture that is very strong, enveloping, and quite authoritarian. This produces a level of compliance from children that allows for pretty much any approach to instruction, and eliminates many of the typical challenges of classroom management. There is a reason why there is a continuing pull in human organizations toward authoritarian approaches. You can get a lot done. But what kind of citizens are you producing? ... Can you educate children in an authoritarian context and also empower them to be active agents in their own lives, who think critically and question injustice in the world around them?”
Consider together what Polakow-Suransky says Eva Moskowitz’s Success Academy Charter Schools in New York City in the context of some of the values you read in John Dewey’s 1997 “Pedagogic Creed.” What are some of the ways Moskowitz’s schools conform to or contrast with Dewey’s ideas about progressive education? What is traded and what is lost in the kind of school discipline in Moskowitz’s schools and other no-excuses charter schools?

The second quote is from a *NY Times* review of Eva Moskowitz’s recently published memoir. Lisa Miller, the *NY Times* book reviewer, writes:

- “Moskowitz has famously made a virtue—one might even say a brand—of her defiance. New York City’s public-school system has been her proving ground, and she has devoted herself to reforming what she sees as its bureaucratic idiocies and its codified inefficiencies...” But at Success Academy charters, “Children, called ‘scholars,’ are expected to understand that ‘following the rules is a condition of being in school.’ Every teacher is required to follow Success’s pedagogical formula and ‘not create chaos by marching to the beat of her own drum.’ And yet this double standard—in which Moskowitz celebrates her own feisty disobedience while attributing the success of the students in her schools to their dutiful compliance—is never explored, leaving a reader to puzzle over whether Moskowitz has noticed it at all. The question of who in this tinderbox of a society is valued for their anti-authoritarian moxie and who for their obeisance is difficult, and charged, but it is one that the founder of a chain of 46 schools, which educate mostly poor children of color, might be expected to consider.”

1. **Many people like to think of school choice as something new, harmless, and liberating. What does this analysis show about the negative consequences of school choice, especially in the context of growing inequality across our society?**
2. **How does the operation of these no-excuses charter schools violate the principles we discussed earlier that are the foundation of public education?**
3. **How does this reviewer’s critique about Moskowitz’s schools relate back to the concerns of the NAACP and the Network for Public Education that caused these two organizations to demand a moratorium on the authorization of new charter schools?**

8:30 Report Outs --- one of biggest concerns discussed at each table and from Dan Bobeczko (reading from the newsprint on the walls).

Invite people to share any overall comments as we conclude.

8:45 Adjourn